

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST
AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST
AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
AMCONSUL MUNICH
AMEMBASSY SOFIA
AMEMBASSY WARSAW

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOSCOW 1546

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, UR
SUBJECT: BREZHNEV'S JANUARY 31 TELEVISION APPEARANCE

1. PERSISTENT RUMORS OF HIS "SERIOUS ILLNESS" NOTWITH-
STANDING, BREZHNEV WAS SHOWN ON THE 9:00 PM TV NEWS
PROGRAM "VREMYA" JANUARY 31 RECEIVING VISITING POLISH
PREMIER JAROSZEWICZ EARLIER THAT DAY.

2. A BRIEF FILM CLIP OF THE MEETING, WHICH APPEARED TO
TAKE PLACE IN BREZHNEV'S USUAL KREMLIN OFFICE, WAS CARRIED
AT THE OPENING OF THE NEWS SHOW. THE FIRST SHOTS WERE
OF BREZHNEV STANDING WITH JAROSZEWICZ AND KOSYGIN. THIS
SEQUENCE ENDED AS BREZHNEV MOTIONED FOR HIS GUEST TO BE
SEATED AND BEGAN TO MOVE TOWARD THE TABLE.

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3. THE NEXT SEQUENCE SHOWED BREZHNEV AND THE
OTHERS SEATED AT THE CONFERENCE TABLE, AND
FEATURED SEVERAL CLOSE-UPS, PARTICULARLY OF THE
RIGHT SIDE OF BREZHNEV'S FACE. BREZHNEV WAS NOT
WEARING GLASSES. JAROSZEWICZ WAS DOING THE TALKING
WITH BREZHNEV RESPONDING WITH NODS AND APPARENTLY

MONOSYLLABIC ARTICULATION. AS IS USUAL IN TV COVERAGE OF THIS KIND OF PROTOCOLARY KREMLIN MEETING, NO SOUND RECORDING OF THE EVENT WAS CARRIED WITH THE VIDEO. BREZHNEV WAS ACCOMPANIED BY KOSYGIN AND BLATOV; JAROSZEWICZ WAS ALONE, AND NO INTERPRETER WAS SHOWN.

4. AFTER VIEWING THE ORIGINAL TELECAST, THE REPLY AT 8:00 AM FEBRUARY 1, AS WELL AS OUR LESS-THAN-PERFECT VIDEOTAPE OF THE PROGRAM, IT SEEMED TO US THAT

--BREZHNEV'S PHYSICAL APPEARANCE WAS MORE OR LESS NORMAL, ALTHOUGH HE DID NOT LOOK STRIKINGLY FIT OR WELL-RESTED;
--UNUSUAL FACIAL SWELLING OR PUFFINESS WAS NOT APPARENT;
--THE FILM WAS MORE CAREFULLY EDITED THAN IS USUAL FOR SUCH OCCASIONS; BREZHNEV WAS NOT SHOWN WALKING TOWARD HIS GUEST, SHAKING HANDS OR WALKING TO THE TABLE AND SITTING DOWN;
--THE ONLY BODY MOVEMENTS SHOWN ON FILM WERE HIS GESTURE TO BE SEATED, AND AN INITIAL STEP TOWARDS THE TABLE, PLUS SOME SHIFTING OF HIS TORSO AS HE WAS SITTING AT THE TABLE; THESE MOVEMENTS APPEARED TO BE SOMEWHAT FORCED, ALTHOUGH THE FILM OF THEM WAS TOO BRIEF TO ALLOW US TO DRAW ANY CONCLUSION AS TO HIS OVERALL CONDITION.
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5. OBVIOUSLY ONE CANNOT OFFER A FIRM JUDGEMENT ON BREZHNEV'S HEALTH FROM A MINUTE OR SO OF CAREFULLY EDITED TV FILM. IF HE WAS "SERIOUSLY ILL", PARTICULARLY WITH A HEART PROBLEM, IT SEEMS INCONCEIVABLE THAT BREZHNEV'S DOCTORS WOULD HAVE ALLOWED HIM TO DRESS, TRAVEL TO THE KREMLIN AND GO THROUGH EVEN LIMITED MOTIONS OF MEETING WITH JAROSZEWIEZ. AT THE LEAST, HIS FILMED RE-APPEARANCE JANUARY 31 ADDS GREATLY TO THE CREDIBILITY OF THE OFFICIAL SOVIET LINE THAT LEONID IL'ICH IS RECOVERING SATISFACTORILY FROM THE FLU.

6. WE WOULD ONLY ADD THAT BREZHNEV AND HIS SUPPORTERS CERTAINLY WERE KEENLY AWARE OF THE PERSISTENT RUMORS IN THE USSR AND ABROAD THAT HIS ILLNESS WAS CONTINUING AND WAS SERIOUS (ON JANUARY 30, FOR EXAMPLE, DISSIDENT KREMLINOLOGIST ROY MEDVEDEV TOLD U.S. JOURNALISTS THAT BREZHNEV WAS SERIOUSLY ILL, CONFINED TO BED, AND "NOT HIMSELF.") IT IS THUS CONCEIVABLE THAT BREZHNEV MADE HIS JANUARY 31 TV APPEARANCE -- IN THE OBVIOUS ABSENCE OF OVERRIDING HEALTH

CONSIDERATIONS -- PRIMARILY FOR REASONS OF POLITICAL
IMAGERY, AND PERHAPS A BIT EARLIER THAN HIS DOCTORS
WOULD HAVE PREFERRED.

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